

The logo for Family Services of Greater Waterbury Inc. features a stylized, wavy line above the words "FAMILY SERVICES" in a large, serif font. Below this, "OF GREATER WATERBURY INC." is written in a smaller, sans-serif font.

FAMILY SERVICES

OF GREATER WATERBURY INC.

To the Members of the Appropriations Committee

February 18, 2009

Family Services of Greater Waterbury has enjoyed a long partnership with The Children's Trust Fund. We are quite saddened and concerned about the possible elimination of this worthy prevention agency and the possible transfer of some programs to the Department of Children and Families.

Each year, approximately 30,000 cases of child maltreatment are reported in Connecticut and an additional 10,000 children are born into families with at least one significant risk factor for abuse and/or neglect. In 1997, recognizing the extent of child abuse, the Connecticut General Assembly established The Children's Trust Fund as a separate and independent state agency with the sole purpose of preventing child abuse and neglect. Between 1997 and 2005, the Children's Trust Fund coordinated, developed, or funded more than 200 programs and initiatives statewide designed to engage families before crisis occurs, to actually keep child abuse/neglect from happening. This proactive approach has kept thousands of children safe and has provided families with the necessary skills to parent effectively.

The Children's Trust Fund acts in many areas including direct service, funding for programs, public awareness of issues, systems change, conducting research and evaluation and training volunteers and others. These are vital services that DCF will not be able to administer keeping with the fidelity of the programs.

The Children's Trust Fund provides parents and families with resources they need to cope with the stresses in their lives and with their children without resorting to abuse or neglect. Considering our present economic challenges, The Children's Trust Fund becomes an even more valuable agency. Parents, now more than ever, need the comprehensive support and direct service provided by this fine agency.

Research has shown that the effects of abuse and neglect can be devastating to a child. Maltreatment can cause impairment in brain development, psychological problems, serious injury and also can contribute to high school drop out rates, involvement in crime as well as poverty. These children who experience abuse and neglect will often end up on the caseloads of the Department of Mental Health and Addictions, Substance Abuse Treatment Centers, The Department of Corrections and/or Social Services as adults and thus, the cycle continues.

We strongly urge you to reconsider eliminating The Children's Trust Fund from the budget. By eliminating this program, you are taking away a resource from families which may be the only resource keeping their children safe.

To house any of CTF's prevention programs within the Department of Children and Families would be devastating. While DCF is charged with child protection, they are currently going through their own re-structuring and growing pains. They are managing three distinct areas; Child Protection, Juvenile Justice and Behavioral Health. To add prevention programs into this mix would not do justice to the delivery of prevention services. Families, at best, are distrustful of DCF. I don't believe families who may be in crisis will voluntarily attend programs run through an agency that has the power to remove their children. To make matters worse, DCF is currently under scrutiny regarding their own abilities to function efficiently as was seen during the recent public hearings.

As Franklin D. Roosevelt said "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future". The same holds true for families in Connecticut who are struggling. We can't build a future for them, but we certainly can build them up for the future, a future that does not include child abuse or neglect. Please do not eliminate The Children's Trust Fund.

Sincerely,

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Director of Operations

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